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HEADLINE: Stephens stumping for fed-lands initiative

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BODY:

Intent on recouping what he calls the state's share of billions of dollars in revenue lost to federal lands, House Speaker Marty Stephens and others are quickly courting as much support as they can to take back to Washington, D.C., where the real battle begins.

On Tuesday, Stephens asked -- and successfully received -- unanimous approval of the "APPLE" initiative in a resolution adopted by Legislative management.

Other groups that stand to benefit, including public **education** leaders and the Utah **Education** Association, support the concept. Former Utah teacher Lily Eskelsen, National **Education** Association's secretary-treasurer-elect, also plans to seek support from the national teacher's union.

After a meeting in Lake Tahoe last month, Stephens won support from lawmakers in neighboring Western states for the effort to collect billions in revenue he says is lost due to federal land policies.

Called the **Action Plan for Public Lands and Education**, the effort urges the federal government to compensate Western states for the "significant impact federal land ownership has on public **education** funding."

Utah spends the least per student in the country and has the most children per taxpayer in the nation.

But Stephens and other lawmakers believe federal land ownership is to blame for relatively low school funding levels in Utah and the West.

In the 11 Western states, the federal government owns an average of 52 percent of each state's land. Federal lands make up an average of 4 percent of other states. Federal land policies prohibit states from collecting taxes and receiving full royalties from developing natural resources on those parcels.

A group of Utah lawmakers estimates the West would be \$14 billion richer if federal lands were sold to private parties so each state had only an average of 4 percent federal land ownership. They want to hit up the federal government for that money, plus \$6.4 billion a year to compensate the West for lost taxes and royalties.

The money would come from federal revenue growth and possibly swapping non-wilderness lands for state gain, and not federal land sales.